



SIGNALS Vol. 1

A REPORT ON HEALTH

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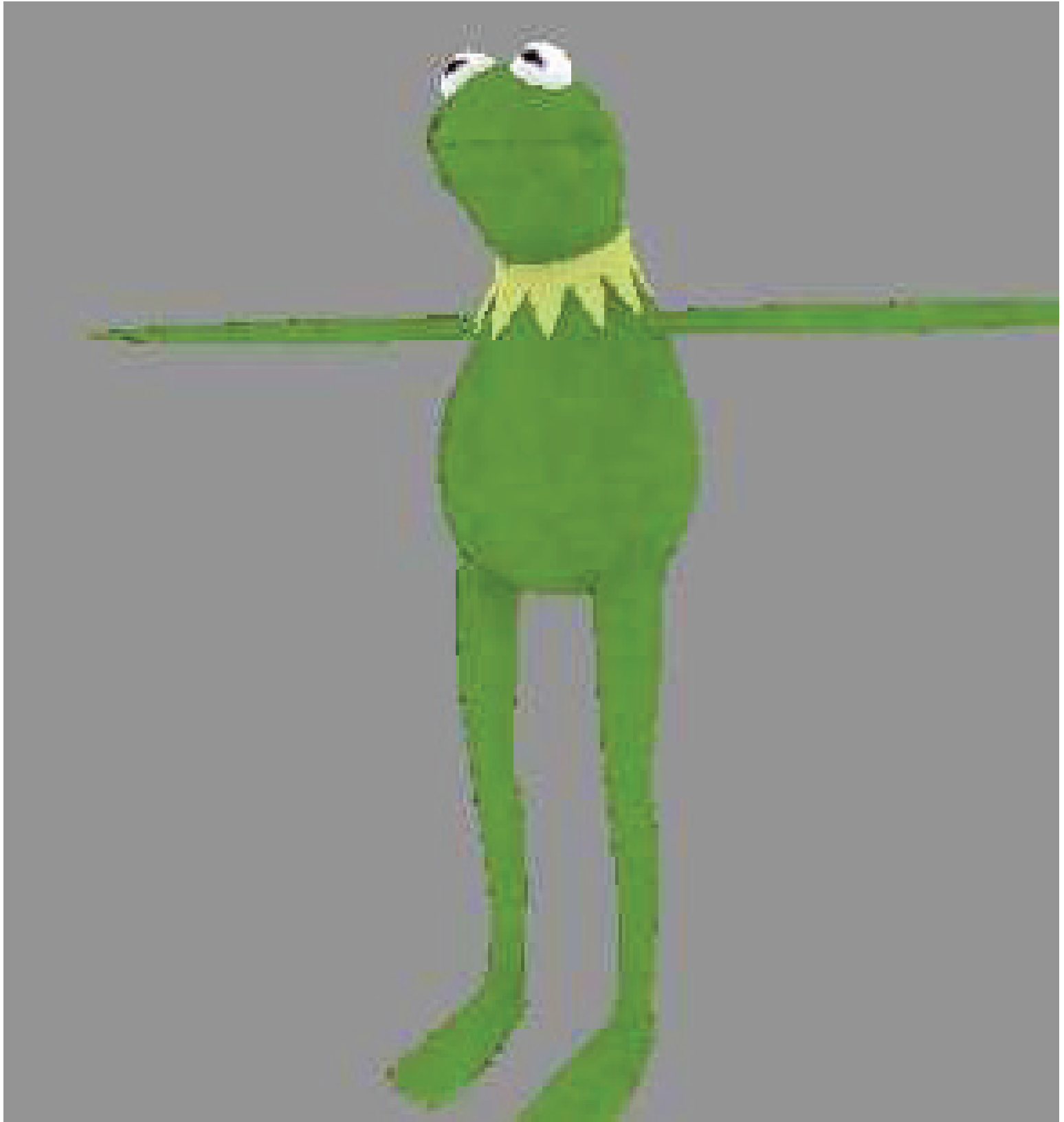
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Consider a world where identity is more than skin deep, and you never really know someone until you see what YouTube recommends to them. The business landscape has changed from thinking about “consumers” in cleanly delineated generations and consumption patterns to a nebulous mix of shifting life stages and niche interests. “Mindset” targeting attempts to sell your own thoughts and personality right back to you.



As art and culture have shifted to accommodate a world where everything is underground, nothing is underground. A new ethic of health has emerged that is digital, spiritual and robotic.

"Are you your body or your avatar?"



kermit 1

I have ADHD and a thing that comes with that is, like, bad insomnia.

kermit 2

How does that make you feel?

kermit 1

In high school, the kids are ruthless. They call me things I don't wanna say here.

kermit 2

Maybe you should join a motorcycle gang. It's like a band of brothers.

kermit 1

I already got one of those.

****Gestures towards Kermit's 2 and 3****

I don't like motorcycles.

Signal № 1: Avatar Therapy

Early this year, a short video of a kid in VR chat wearing a “Kermit the Frog” avatar and disclosing his experience being bullied at school went relatively viral. The timid 15-year-old speaks about his social anxiety and how he uses VR to connect with others.



This short video reached almost 5 million people, and it’s a beautiful glimpse into the kinds of digital connection young people can only find online.

When you’re in an online world, you’re in control of how you appear to that world and how it perceives you, so you can find intimacy and connection there in ways you can’t in person.

Young people are expressing a deep need for mental health and dealing with stress. Avatar Therapy is one of many new ways that we are seeking help with expressing ourselves and finding new avenues to mental peace.

WHY BE
SOMEONE
WHEN YOU
CAN BE
ANYONE?

We spoke to famed behavioral economist Dan Ariely to get his perspective on this new reality.

"Hi.

I'm not sure I have intelligent things to say about this topic

In terms of VR... a couple of things to think about.

One is that one of the things that is very helpful in terms of behavioral change is to give people models for imitation.

That's why infomercials work so well. They give us a model of how this new juicer would work in our lives, or something like that.

Having a model for imitation is very good because it basically models behavior.

From that perspective, I think that VR is going to be very helpful because it will give us things that look more realistic that provide a better model for imitation.

So I'm a big fan of that."

Signal № 2: Capitalist Crystals

We're living in "the New New Age" where wellness brands and alternative health have evolved a slick veneer of direct to consumer, social media marketing, hyper-aesthetic branding, and science-backed claims. In an era defined by great social, economic and political uncertainty, everybody is looking to optimize their lives. There was a time when the Californian ideology (techno-utopianism) had taken root, and we looked to technology to bring us happier, healthier lives. But the data is in, and we're more sick, suicidal, stressed and obese than ever before. Our institutions seem to be controlled by corporate interests and we've never had less trust in our ability to stay healthy. Nearly 1 in 3 Americans suffer from hypertension and 8 in 10 suffer from stress, and depression is at an 80-year-high.



Americans face a health crisis that is increasingly being talked about in spiritual terms, and a host of wellness brands have popped up to service this massive demand for healthfulness, creating a market estimated at \$4.2 trillion in 2018 by the Global Wellness Institute.

Now, this market is coming to life through social media marketing- taking the ethos of "New Age" thinking and applying sophisticated digital marketing strategies; pushing the crystal-curious through a sales funnel in record speed. Some of the popular but scientifically dubious wellness options like moon crystals have been around for ages, but are only becoming widely popular again through cultural relevance, influencer campaigns, and glossy marketing aesthetics.

We find a blemish in our corporeal reality, but instead of digging around in our corporate insurance site to find approved healthcare providers, we snap a picture to our private groupchat and ask friends for advice on which supplements to

deploy while scrounging for an edible to take the edge off. Trawling ZocDoc makes you feel sick, but scrolling through #jaderoller posts makes you feel empowered.

The most typical “New New Age” brand is Gwyneth Paltrow’s GOOP, which curates alternative healthcare options for the brand’s devotees. GOOP’s offerings range from products and therapies with some data-backed scientific study to those that are pure wishful thinking- but all of them are wrapped in the clean branding and influencer marketing of Paltrow’s sophisticated organization. Check out our VICE News report on the GOOP Wellness Summit [here](#).

ARE WE SICK
OR ARE WE
JUST BORED?

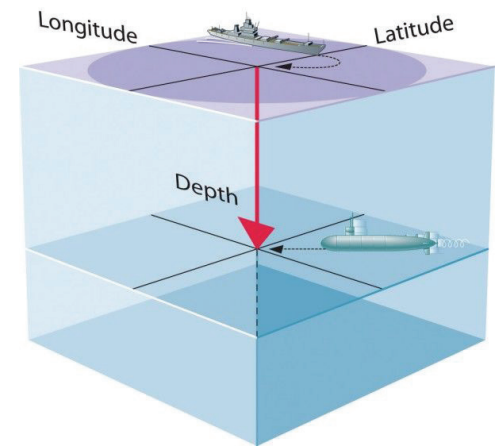
Dan also had some thoughts on this.

"In terms of wellness, I think that it's true that a lot of brands are just jumping on the bandwagon, you could say they're not doing things that are real. But I think wellness is so important. We don't sleep enough, there's all kinds of things that are happening. Even though a lot of it I don't think truly comes from truly worrying about their customers, I think the outcome could be valuable."

Signal № 3: Depth Charges

Mental health destigmatization has created a paradox. In our hyper-capitalist world, we compete to prove that we are valuable to our peers, and that our work has meaning. In the same way that "busyness" denotes importance, being "stressed" denotes working hard. We adopt mindfulness and yoga and CBD oil if only to show our co-workers and friends how hard we are working, and the toll it is taking on us.

One of the only ways out of this paradox is to use deep learning to stimulate your creativity and put your mind at ease. You don't need to signal a stressed mind to prove your productivity if you have something creative to show for yourself.'



Being young means being plugged into a world of fantastically available information.

Young people today are passionate makers who want to be the first of their friends to know about new things.

New information informs their creative process, empowering them to be leaders by making things that are relevant to the culture.

Deep learning is a coping strategy for a world with constant demands on your time, where you're either creating something or signaling your stress to others.

An earlier ethic of the Internet can be imagined as a savannah, with new species of thought and ideas emerging the more you explored. It was possible for older people to imagine an emptier Internet with much less information, so each time you "surf" you have the potential to run into something new. "Surfers" would explore as if on safari on the intellectual savannah, hunting the occasional idea and sharing it with everyone.

The new approach to the Internet is more akin to a battleship dropping a depth

*charge- sinking down until
it explodes spectacularly at
just the right depth.*

For kids today, who grew up with their parents addicted to smartphones, Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest, it isn't enough to wait for the next viral hit. Entertainment has changed from the instant gratification of social media platforms to deep exploration of the vast universe that is the Internet.

True digital natives seek a holistic understanding of the subjects they are curious about, and they use not only the breadth of the internet but its depth. For those of us interested in starting a business, we aren't just watching the Patreon and Kickstarter videos, but also the critical responses to both on YouTube.

THINGS
WILL BE

FINE

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